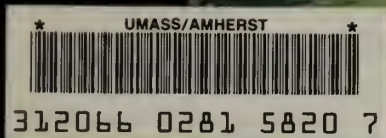


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There's *no place* like our
home.



Windows of Opportunity to a Century of Regional Collaboration

Preface

There's No Place Like Our Home: Windows of Opportunity to a Century of Regional Collaboration was written by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC), the regional planning agency that encompasses 43 cities and towns that constitute the Pioneer Valley region in western Massachusetts. The agency's focus is both local—for the good of individual communities—and regional—for the good of the area overall.

Since 1962, PVPC has depended upon public comment and feedback to discover opportunities and to help create fair, workable solutions to problems with transportation, environmental quality, land use, and economic development issues. Recent planning recommendations in these major categories can be found in three reports: *The Pioneer Valley Regional Transportation Plan* (1997), *Valley Vision: The Regional Land Use Plan for the Pioneer Valley* (1997), and *The Pioneer Valley Plan for Progress: Economic Strategies for the Region* (1994). Although they cover specific planning topics, these reports also converge in important ways. For example, reducing motor vehicle emissions must be addressed during both transportation planning and land use planning, while creatively reusing abandoned industrial land is both a land use and an economic development concern.

There's No Place Like Our Home is not merely a summary of common themes in existing reports. Rather, it is a workbook for you and other interested citizens and officials of the Pioneer Valley region to study, to ponder, to question, and to use as a springboard for action to shape your community and the region for the next quarter century—and beyond.

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There's *no place* like our
home.

Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

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Introduction:

THE PIONEER VALLEY AT THE CENTURY CROSSROADS

Back to the Future

Take a good look around you. Look at your neighborhood. If you live in a small city or town, look at your center. If you live in a large urban area, look at your downtown. Now, expand your range of vision. Look at the mill sites that dot the Valley . . . the rural farmlands . . . the sweeping Connecticut River . . . the state highways that stitch all these together.

Now . . . step back twenty-five years into the past. Ask yourself, "How can I make sure these places look as beautiful in the future as they do today?" Look around in the present. What would you do to change events and decisions that have resulted in unattractive, undesirable places around you today? Finally, if you project yourself twenty-five (or more) years into the future, you'll realize how strongly the choices of today shape the landscape of tomorrow.

As you look around, you'll see things you want to keep intact through the new century. You'll see other things you'd like to change. You'll think about balancing growth and progress with preservation and protection of natural resources. You'll discover what you can't live without and what compromises you must make for the good of the whole Pioneer Valley region.

Three Reports, One Refrain

The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, in its capacity as state-designated planning agency for the Pioneer Valley region, has developed three regionwide plans that cover three major topics: environmental protection and land use, economic development, and transportation. All three are concerned with the goal of creating livable, prosperous communities throughout our region.



The Plan for Progress

What it's about: Short-term, mid-term, and long-term strategies for revitalizing the Pioneer Valley region's economy and creating job opportunities for its residents.

What it recommends:

- Develop a regional identity that connects Pioneer Valley communities.
- Tap the region's extensive higher education system.
- Increase exporting of goods and services.
- Stimulate economic growth in urban core communities such as Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee.
- Attract and keep businesses in the Pioneer Valley region by helping them receive capital funding, secure permits, and find and retain dedicated, skilled workers.
- Clean up and promote the Connecticut River for recreational use and economic growth.

How it evolved: Individuals from the public, private, and civic sectors helped to shape the plan during two intensive sessions, and the region's communities gave their ideas from rural, suburban, and urban perspectives during a series of public meetings.

Valley Vision

What it's about: Land use and environmental solutions to improve the quality of living and working for residents and businesses throughout the Pioneer Valley region.

What it recommends:

- Build and redevelop neighborhoods, town centers, and commercial areas in ways that protect community character and the environment.
- Revitalize downtowns.
- Redevelop and clean up abandoned, polluted industrial buildings and land.
- Protect farmlands, forests, rivers, and waterfronts from rampant development.
- Redesign commercial areas to include housing, parks, and easy access to transit, bikeways, and pedestrian facilities.
- Create a network of trails for walking and biking to the office, store, and other everyday destinations.
- Protect drinking water supplies from pollution.

How it evolved: Communities and interested organizations reviewed detailed land use recommendations on community maps, while private sector groups such as chambers of commerce, building trade organizations, and economic development groups offered comments to help shape the plan.

The Regional Transportation Plan

What it's about: Transportation plans and improvement projects that will ensure a safe, dependable, and environmentally sound transportation system for the Pioneer Valley region.

What it recommends:

- Increase highway safety.
- Decrease traffic congestion and vehicle exhaust emissions that contribute to air pollution.
- Make public buses and vans fully accessible to disabled and elderly riders.
- Develop a network of safe routes and paths for bicycling, walking, and other non-motorized forms of transportation.
- Coordinate all modes of transportation—bus, personal automobile, truck, train, taxi, bicycle, and pedestrian—to shorten travel time, keep the air cleaner, and increase the region's mobility in an economical fashion.

How it evolved: Public forums throughout the region allowed regional planners to discuss transportation issues with citizens, local elected officials, city and town planners, business leaders, and advocacy groups, among others.

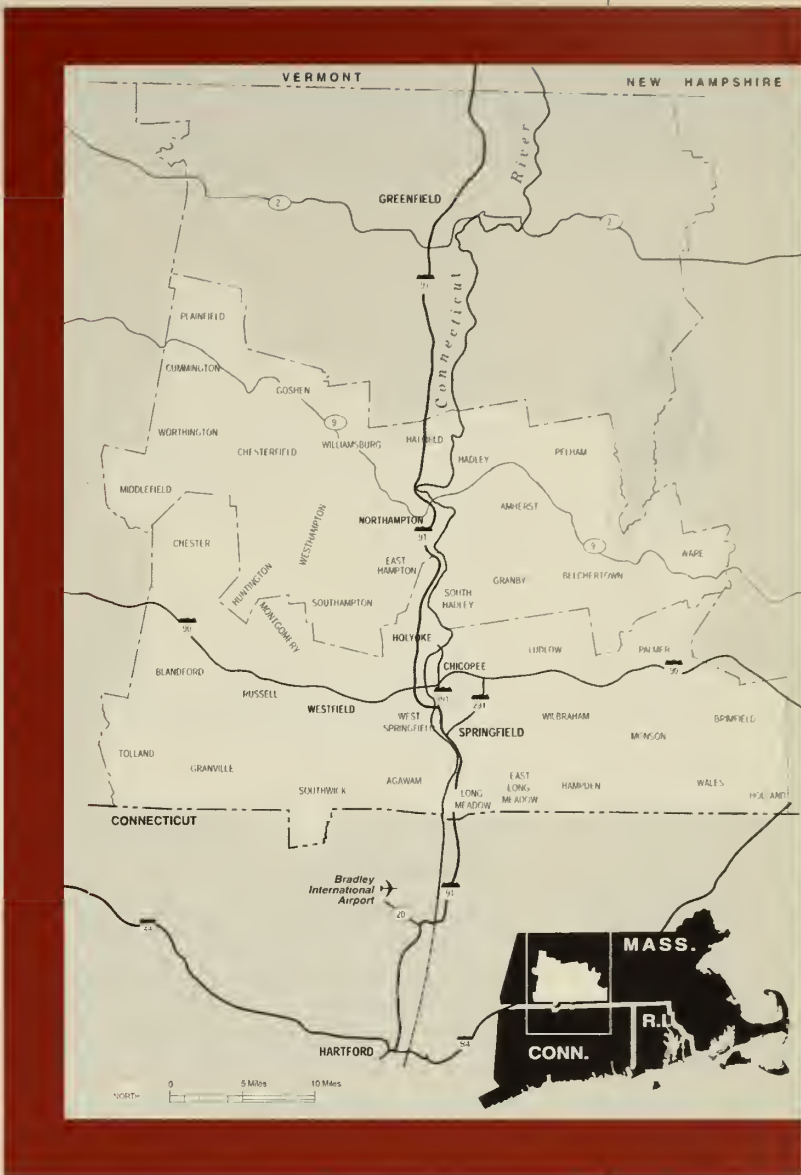
The Planning Process

Regional planning can be a creative, highly interactive process among citizens, towns, cities, business leaders, local organizations, federal and state agencies, and other interested parties. Good regional planning happens when the public is presented with a clear, factual analysis of a given situation or issue and is then asked to participate wholeheartedly in designing solutions based on that analysis. There are many voices in the Pioneer Valley, and a regional plan must work to balance and synthesize them all.

Where You Come In

If you've ever attended a public meeting, you know that planning issues often raise strong opinions that can clash loudly. Should that supermarket be built downtown? Should a traffic light be installed at this intersection? Should someone clean up and develop that abandoned, contaminated industrial site? Should a shopping mall be allowed to expand into nearby residential neighborhoods? Can existing development regulations be streamlined without compromising the environment and public health? Indeed, the list of issues—as well as public opinions—is endless.

Your opinions count. As we strive to put plans into action, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission depends on your continued interest and involvement to help shape the future of your own community and that of the entire Valley. In *There's No Place Like Our Home*, we are asking for your help in many ways. From small actions like carpooling once a week to more committed, long-term actions such as serving on a municipal board, you will help not only your community, but also the region as a whole. We invite your feedback on *There's No Place Like Our Home* and your ideas about putting its suggestions into action. Above all, we urge you to see us as your partner in a serious joint mission to create livable, prosperous communities that collectively make for a healthy, diverse, strong, safe, and vibrant region.



What will you see twenty-five years from now? Consider this vision: a landscape of healthy cities and towns, framed by plenty of green open space, powered by strong businesses, and connected by an efficient transportation system. Considering the past, planning ahead, and working together for our common good, we can create a region that won't need to go back to the future—it will already be there.

Wherever You Go, *There You Are:*

THE REGION'S SPECIAL PLACES

Wherever you go in the Pioneer Valley region, you will find places that feel familiar and personal—whether you live there, work there, learn there, play there, or just glance there, wondering what they could be with some attention and effort.

We invite you to take a close look at a select group of places and to ponder their merits and shortcomings. As you read about them, think about other places that mean something special to you and consider what's positive, what's problematic, and—above all—what's possible.

Farmland and *Open Space*

Where We Stand

Since the Norwottuck Indians settled on the alluvial plains of the Connecticut River, farming has flourished in the Pioneer Valley region. People are proud of our region's landscape of tobacco barns, old farmhouses, pastures, cropland, and livestock. The good news is that ten percent of our 90,000 acres of farmland has been protected under the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program, helping to preserve rural areas for future generations. The bad news is that, due to the economic instability of farming, many families have sold some or all of their farmland for development, while many more acres remain at risk as development continues to sprawl across our region's landscape.

One result of unplanned, sprawling residential development in our rural areas is longer commute times for those who work in the urbanized areas of the Valley, creating traffic congestion problems on major corridors such as Route 9 in Hadley and Route 5 in West Springfield. In addition, we are losing not only precious lands but also a piece of our economic base—farming—that has been a part of our economy since the Valley was settled. And, to complete the troubling cycle, the viability of local small farms is threatened as lands become more valuable for residential and commercial developments.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes a vista of beautiful rural lands and active farms existing comfortably alongside appropriate, well-planned residential and commercial growth. What should these places offer? Attractive housing developments that make wise use of scarce open spaces . . . commercial development that respects rural character and surrounding farms . . . innovative development options, such as bed-and-breakfasts and farm-related tourism, that build a tax base to support the costs of new residential infrastructure and service needs.

T a k e *Action*

Often the simplest actions result in the biggest gains. Here are some ways you, your friends, your neighbors, and your regional community can take actions that collectively will accomplish great things for the Pioneer Valley's open spaces and farmlands, as well as for you personally.

To preserve the Pioneer Valley region's farmlands and open spaces for future generations . . .

Do This . . .

Support the state's permanent preservation programs by lobbying for increased funding for the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program and the Conservation Restriction program. Raise local support and funding for preservation efforts.

Teach your children about the importance of farming in the Pioneer Valley and the place it holds in our region's history.

To keep local farmers in business . . .

Do This . . .

Purchase locally-grown farm products produced or processed by Pioneer Valley agricultural businesses.

Lobby for the adoption of zoning regulations that protect open space and farmland from development.

Get involved in updating your community's open space plan.

To improve air quality in the region . . .

Do This . . .

Purchase locally-grown farm products produced or processed by Pioneer Valley agricultural businesses.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

More land will be permanently protected for open space and agriculture.

Children will learn and appreciate the value of our farms and open spaces so that, as adults, they will support efforts to protect these lands.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Local farmers will have strong businesses and less incentive to sell their land for residential or commercial development.

Farming in the Pioneer Valley will continue to be a source of income for our economy, and our communities will be supplied with fresh, locally grown farm products.

Open space protection priorities will be identified and your community may be eligible for Massachusetts Self-Help grant funding.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Shorter driving distances for produce deliveries means less pollution generated by trucks.

Opportunity!

Conservation Commission

In each community in the commonwealth, a Conservation Commission has been established to protect wetlands, stream and river banks, vernal pools, and other environmentally sensitive areas. In addition to these enforcement duties, every Conservation Commission is charged with creating and adopting an Open Space and Recreation Plan for its city or town: a guide for each community to identify, maintain, protect, and obtain open lands and natural areas. Any undeveloped land with natural, recreational, or resource value is considered in the plan: forests, shorelines, and hilltops as well as trails, parks, and farmland. Citizens can become involved in the planning process by volunteering to serve on the Open Space and Recreation Committee or by simply attending and participating in the planning meetings. Commissions also seek citizen support and input on community clean-up efforts, tree planting, and advisory review of local development projects.

Did you know?

As rural towns in the Pioneer Valley experience a shift in land use from open space and farmland to residential development, a shift also occurs in the tax base. For each dollar a community raises in taxes, it must appropriate some portion of that dollar for building and maintaining the community's schools, roads, sewer system, and other municipal services. According to a study by the American Farmland Trust, it costs a community 31 cents of every dollar raised in taxes to service farmland and forestland. However, residential development costs a community an average of \$1.11 for every dollar raised in taxes. Consequently, although residential development does increase the tax base, it does not pay for all the services it requires. In order to manage this shift in the tax base, towns must carefully plan for new residential development and recognize the economic benefit of farmland preservation.

Urban *Centers*

Where We Stand

Over the past three decades, the Pioneer Valley region's urban centers—especially the urban core area composed of Springfield, Holyoke, and Chicopee—have unhappily seen a steady loss of retail outlets, businesses, homeowners, and population. What's left behind? A weakened tax base, a real or perceived increase in crime leading to public safety concerns, and a diminishing need for the traditional functions of downtown as the center for commerce, banking, basic shopping, entertainment, and government.

The Pioneer Valley, like hundreds of metropolitan regions throughout the United States, struggles with an urban core that is rapidly becoming disinvested—that is, regarded less and less as the “center of gravity” for working and living. Disinvestment robs urban areas of the social, economic, and human resources needed to provide job opportunities for inner-city residents. Disinvestment leaves cities unable to invest in water, sewer, building, and road improvements in the urban center, making these areas unattractive for future residential, commercial, and industrial development. Disinvestment stretches urban resources and services to their limits and severely weakens the backbone of the community and, in turn, the region at large.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes economically healthy and culturally vibrant urban centers that support the growth of businesses and provide safe, attractive environments with the qualities that will attract people to live in the cities—and keep them there. These qualities include affordable housing choices, safe neighborhoods, clean streets, excellent schools, high-quality jobs, and a keen sense of community, as well as amenities and activities such as parks, festivals, and cultural events—all of which draw people to the city to live, work, learn, and play.

T a k e *Action*

You don't have to serve in city government to help make urban centers pleasant, safe places to live, work, and shop. You can take small actions that will benefit you personally and will also create a ripple effect that touches others in the community and in the region.

To keep the economy of the urban center healthy . . .

Do This . . .

Use services and businesses located downtown.

Visit and rediscover cultural and entertainment opportunities downtown.

Locate your business downtown or in an urban center area.

Help create, attend, or volunteer at job training and educational facilities in the urban center.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Your money will circulate locally and create wealth in your own community and the region.

The economic health of the urban center will improve and will, in turn, boost the local and regional economy.

Your urban center can become a model of economic revitalization for other cities.

A well-trained workforce will encourage more businesses to locate in the urban area, leading to a critical competitive advantage for urban-based companies.

To improve the quality of life in your neighborhood and have a say in your city's future . . .

Do This . . .

Join your local neighborhood association to listen, to learn, to organize, and to volunteer.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

You will be educated about current issues in your neighborhood and in your city, and will be prepared to participate in neighborhood improvement projects.

To improve air quality and enjoy alternatives to automobile travel . . .

Do This . . .

Walk, bicycle, or ride the bus in the downtown area or to the urban center from outlying suburbs.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Traffic congestion will be decreased and the air you breathe will be cleaner, not only downtown but throughout the region.

Opportunity!

Neighborhood Associations

A neighborhood association is made up of citizens seeking to improve physical, social, or economic conditions in a neighborhood or business district. Neighborhood associations undertake a variety of projects: creating neighborhood amenities such as gardens, parks, and school bus stop shelters; restoring historic sites or buildings; organizing public safety programs such as neighborhood watches and citizens patrols; and holding community-building events like block parties and neighborhood festivals. In addition to completing specific projects, an association might also elect representatives who can maintain direct contact with government officials to ensure that neighborhood concerns are heard and understood. Neighborhood associations have been formed in neighborhoods of every size in the Pioneer Valley in cities, towns, and villages. Any motivated citizen wishing to build a stronger sense of community in a neighborhood can start an association.

Did you know?

DISINVESTMENT: How It Happens

A community's tax base increases both by investment in new development and by redevelopment of older structures. If investment in the urban core fails to at least keep up with the rate of depreciation, disinvestment occurs. A downward spiral begins: If buildings in the urban core are not modernized, they cannot compete for tenants with newer properties in suburban areas. As a result, it's harder for cities to maintain their tax bases, which then makes it harder to raise revenue for municipal services.



Village and Rural *Town Centers*

Where We Stand

The New England village center has traditionally been a place for members of the community to live, meet, worship, shop, and celebrate at festivals and parades. Many of the village centers in New England and in the Pioneer Valley are centered around a green open space that may be bordered by the town hall, church, library, war memorial, or meeting place. They range in size from larger centers like Northampton, which attracts shoppers and art lovers from throughout the region, to medium-sized centers such as West Springfield, which primarily serves the needs of the community, to small rural centers like Chesterfield, which consists of little more than the town hall and a general store. These village centers all function differently and serve different blends of residents and businesses. But they all have one thing in common: they draw people into the heart of a community.

Many village centers are now lost or hidden behind congested streets or commercial developments. The services that residents once could readily reach on foot in the center of town are now found in places accessible only by car. Some village centers are losing their historic character as modern signs and large parking lots replace traditional New England landscapes. Meanwhile, residents are losing nearby safe, clean places where they can visit with neighbors, enjoy an afternoon snack, or just relax under a shady tree.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes beautiful village and rural town centers that typify New England charm and are the focus of community life, whether they are bustling business areas or quiet village greens dotted with a few benches. What should these places give you? Opportunities for community interaction, recreation, and entertainment . . . places to walk or bicycle without worries about heavy automobile traffic . . . attractive common areas and sidewalks free of trash and graffiti . . . rows of active businesses instead of vacant storefronts in commercial areas.

Opportunity!

Town Meeting

For the small rural towns, New England's traditional model of government continues to be centered around the local legislative body known as Town Meeting. Town Meeting is convened at least once a year, usually in the spring, and is likely to meet a few more times during the year to discuss special issues. Opportunities for citizens wishing to influence local planning and growth issues are also offered at regularly held meetings and forums sponsored by local planning boards, selectboards, and special advisory committees.

T a k e *Action*

All over the country and all over the Pioneer Valley, larger communities are re-discovering their village centers, while many rural towns are taking steps to preserve their centers' traditional civic roles. Citizens are working individually and in concert with others—from patronizing small businesses in the village center to participating actively in local government—and enjoying the many rewards of living the modern version of the quintessential New England village-centered life. Here's what you can do.

To protect the community character of your village or rural town center . . .

Do This . . .

Lobby for zoning provisions in the village center to prohibit auto-oriented, large-scale commercial development.

Lobby for design standards for commercial development (such as signs, building facades, and parking) that maintain historic character.

Attend town meeting and other public hearings that solicit public comment.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Commercial areas in larger village centers are accessible to pedestrians and don't overwhelm the existing historic architecture.

Small rural town centers are protected from inappropriate development and remain hubs of civic activity. Your village center remains a place where you want to be because of its attractive and pleasant atmosphere.

The village center is a product of what you and your community want, not just what a developer recommends.

To improve air quality and enjoy alternatives to automobile travel . . .

Do This . . .

Lobby your local government for bike and pedestrian connections from residential areas to the town center.

Identify dangerous bike, pedestrian, and bus areas to local officials.

Ride a bike or walk to the center of town whenever possible.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

You can travel safely by foot or by bicycle from your neighborhood to your village center.

You can prevent accidents and direct public attention (and funds) to community needs.

You and your fellow residents will breathe cleaner air and will help the region do the same by cutting down on your automobile use.

To keep the community's economy healthy . . .

Do This . . .

Shop at businesses located in the village center.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Local merchants stay in business. Patrons are drawn to a town center that is filled with pedestrian activity, making it a safe place to visit.

Mill *Buildings*

Where We Stand

Mill buildings might be termed the white elephants of modern manufacturing. Once icons of our New England industrial landscape, they now sit abandoned or only partly used, often on contaminated soil. Mills represent both a problem and an opportunity. People like the idea of restoring these typically charming old buildings for new uses, but a number of obstacles may loom. In the past, for example, it was natural for workers to live near the mills. But today, given what we know about the environmental abuses wrought over decades of unregulated industrial practices, it's understandable that neighborhoods may not be willing to see adjacent mills start up again.

Even silent and unused, these mill sites frequently hold toxic chemical wastes and other hazardous materials left behind by previous owners. Until very recently, well-intended environmental clean-up laws have discouraged interested developers from buying and reusing abandoned properties. Even if the land is clean by environmental standards, the buildings themselves are difficult and expensive to bring up to modern codes for industrial space. Heating, ventilation, fire protection, elevator and handicapped accessibility, and environmental issues can drive renovation costs too high for many willing developers.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes environmentally safe land and rejuvenated mill buildings that contribute to the local tax base. This vision is based on an appreciation of the unique heritage our mill buildings represent, as well as a desire to save sites and to preserve historic architecture whenever possible—for example, by rehabilitating mills into artists' studios, offices, retail shops, entertainment areas, museums, elderly housing, community centers, sheltered workshops, and residences.



T a k e *Action*

Mill building revitalization efforts provide a prime opportunity to become involved in local politics and to affect the aesthetic, environmental, and economic landscape in your community . . . and in the Pioneer Valley region as a whole, as other communities are inspired by successful mill projects elsewhere.

To make the best use of environmental and economic resources . . .

Do This . . .

Urge local officials to inventory and assess mill buildings in your community, and to plan and recommend potential uses and efforts to attract businesses to occupy them over the short- and long-range future.

Advocate that local officials pursue the cleanup and redevelopment of mill sites as an alternative to building new commercial developments.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

New life will be added to buildings and areas of towns and cities that have been neglected. The sooner these sites are cleaned up, the sooner they can be reused . . . and the sooner they can begin generating jobs and tax revenues for the community.

Existing roads, sewer systems, and water lines will be used to service mill tenants. Undeveloped open spaces will be saved from unnecessary encroachment.

To improve the quality of life in your neighborhood and to have a say in your community's future . . .

Do This . . .

Attend planning board or other public meetings where mill redevelopment issues are on the agenda.

Support efforts to link mill redevelopment projects with the region's universities and colleges.

Urge the private sector to invest in mill redevelopment instead of building on pristine land far removed from the region's urban centers.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Projects will have a greater chance of being successful with citizen input and involvement.

Mills can be redeveloped and space can be provided for business incubators, satellite classrooms, and research facilities.

Private investment provides not only funding but also credibility for projects, making them more likely to command broad support and to succeed.



Opportunity!

Master Plans, Strategic Plans, and Area Plans

Planning boards generally assume a leadership role in planning efforts at the city and town level. However, citizen input and participation in the planning process is essential if planning is to be relevant and plans are to be successfully implemented.

A Master Plan (sometimes called a “Comprehensive Plan”) sets the foundation for all other planning efforts by establishing a vision for the future of a community and by identifying the tasks needed to fulfill that vision. The master plan establishes goals and policies for land use in a community and can provide guidance to many boards, committees, and government officials. Citizens are encouraged to participate in meetings, public forums, surveys, and brainstorming sessions (often referred to as “visioning”). In many cases, they are invited to help write the plan by becoming members of subcommittees or work groups.

A Strategic Plan is a document developed to guide efforts toward accomplishing a specific goal or project. Strategic plans are used, for example, to revitalize village centers and downtown business districts, create park and trail systems, improve neighborhood housing, or address economic development needs and problems. Citizens who have a particular area of expertise or interest are often invited to participate in the strategic planning process.

Area Plans (sometimes called “Sector Plans”) are physical plans developed for specific neighborhoods or sites. Residents of the neighborhood or site are often invited to participate in this type of planning effort. Oftentimes a planning board will provide professional designers to help residents visualize their ideas for developing an area (this is sometimes referred to as a “charrette”). Sites that are typically subjects of area plans include town-owned vacant lands, older industrial mill sites, and former landfill sites.

The Connecticut *River*

Where We Stand

The Connecticut River, designated in 1998 by the President as an American Heritage River, is undeniably New England's premier river, flowing from the northern border of Vermont more than 400 miles south to Long Island Sound. Each turn of the Connecticut River presents a new landscape of industrial mill towns, extraordinary forests, and picturesque farmlands—a landscape that the river helped build, and a landscape that defines not only the Pioneer Valley but also our nation's very roots.

But the growth of our cities and towns and the development of roads and railroads has had the unfortunate consequence of cutting off our access to the river from the shoreline. Interstate highways, rail corridors, industrial complexes, large farms, and housing developments occupy much of the river's shoreline, limiting our ability to swim, fish, and boat in its waters. Even more troubling, combined sewer overflows—resulting from inadequate sewage treatment capacity producing overflows from sewers—have polluted the river from the Holyoke Dam south to the Connecticut-Massachusetts border. River cleanup is, in fact, a matter of federal law, which requires us to achieve national water quality standards to make the Connecticut River fishable and swimmable.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes a transformed Connecticut River—a clean and healthy natural resource for recreation and economic revitalization in our region's urban areas and for the Pioneer Valley as a whole. What should the river offer you? Fishing, swimming, picnicking, boating, and scenic viewing not just for private landowners but also for the public . . . walking and biking on riverside trails along the river . . . the knowledge that thousands of plant and animal species—some endangered—are being protected from harmful human activity.

T a k e *Action*

You can have a powerful effect and see dramatic benefits for the Connecticut River when you join with other citizens and tell your elected officials what you want the river to be for you, your community, and the region, as well as for future generations. There are also individual actions you can take to promote and protect this priceless resource.

Do This . . .

Support the adoption of local zoning regulations that protect the river and its surrounding land.

Join a committee or write a letter of support to the committee in your area that is working on the design and construction of rail trails or bike paths along the river in your community.

Press for federal, state, and local policies, funding, and regulations that promote the reconstruction of combined sewers and clean-up of combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

Tell your local government about access areas that need to be improved.

Place your large tracts of open space or farmland that border the river under land trust or state land protection programs such as Agricultural Preservation Restriction, Chapter 61, and Conservation Restriction.

Work with the local conservation commission to catalogue the river's plant and animal species and to identify ecologically sensitive areas along the river that should be closed to public access.

Learn about the Watershed Initiative through your local conservation commission or the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, and participate in river clean-up events and other protection activities.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

New development along the river will be limited to projects that are sensitive to the natural environment and that open up, rather than close off, access in appropriate areas.

You and other residents will be able to enjoy the river close up on a recreational trail system that meets the needs of the community and the ecological needs of the river's environment.

The river will be a clean, swimmable, fishable resource for environmental quality, scenic beauty, and recreation.

You and other citizens will be able to use the river in ways that respect the balance between personal enjoyment and environmental protection.

Your land will remain a protected natural resource adding to the ecological integrity of the river's ecosystem. (In addition, you can benefit from tax incentive programs that are available in exchange for permanent deed restrictions.)

You will become better informed about and more connected with river protection, land conservation, and recreational access issues in your community and in the entire region.

The river and its surrounding historical and natural resources will be protected, promoted, and enjoyed as you become involved with other stewards of the Connecticut River.

Opportunity!

The Massachusetts Watershed Initiative is a collaborative partnership involving state agencies, regional planning agencies, environmental organizations, and local communities working to find solutions to today's most pressing water resource problems. All of our Pioneer Valley communities are connected by water, and each connection is part of a watershed. Massachusetts is composed of 27 major watersheds, four of which are in the Pioneer Valley: the Westfield, Connecticut, Quaboag, and Chicopee River watersheds. Each of Massachusetts' 27 watersheds has a watershed team with a full-time team leader. These watershed teams ask citizens to help identify locally appropriate solutions to watershed-based problems such as water pollution created by stormwater runoff from roads, driveways and parking lots; combined sewer overflows; unsafe swimming and fishing conditions in our surface water bodies; and drinking water quality and quantity.

To explore ways to get involved with the watershed team that serves your location, contact the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs staff member who serves as watershed team leader, your local watershed association, or the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

Did you know?

Pioneer Valley Region communities send up to 59 million gallons of raw sewage into the Connecticut River with every typical rain-storm. More than 130 combined sewer outflow points have been identified in Agawam, Chicopee, Holyoke, Ludlow, South Hadley, Springfield, and West Springfield. According to the Connecticut River 2020 Strategy (a long-range plan for revitalizing the river), 90 percent of these discharges must be eliminated in order to achieve federally mandated "fishable/swimmable" standards.



Highways and Byways: The Region's

Circulation System

Where We Stand

Whether they're commuting to work, going shopping, or grabbing something to eat, most people in the Pioneer Valley region find themselves each day on one of the many state highways that stitch the Valley together. These highways are familiar places to all of us: Route 9 in Hadley and Amherst, Route 20 in Westfield and West Springfield, Boston Road in Springfield and Wilbraham, Route 5 in West Springfield and Holyoke, Route 33 in Chicopee, and many others.

We have made these roads vital to our lives, as centers of commerce and as transportation links that provide bridges over the rivers and connect our communities to each other and to the major interstates. Looking closer at these ribbons of highways lined with malls, fast food restaurants, and supermarkets, it's not difficult to see the traffic congestion they suffer. Residents struggle daily to balance conveniences such as personal automobiles and nearby shopping opportunities with the problems that result: heavy air pollution, bumper-to-bumper gridlock, and miles of anonymous buildings that hide the beauty of surrounding landscapes.

What Do You Want?

Pioneer Valley citizens, business and civic leaders, and others have told us that their vision of the region includes roads that are safe and easy to travel, attractive landscapes to view during their daily commutes, and convenient access to shopping and business. This vision springs from the realization that personal sacrifices sometimes must be made to win other benefits. What should our roadways offer you? A comfortable margin of room between vehicles . . . well-maintained surfaces . . . safe travel . . . air that's not brown with pollution . . . creative options for getting around, such as reliable and convenient buses, sidewalks, bike lanes, and off-road paths.

Did you know?

The Pioneer Valley region, like hundreds of other metropolitan areas, faces air quality problems that cause it to be designated a "Serious Non-Attainment Area" by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for high amounts of ground level ozone in the air during the summer months. While some of these emissions come from industry, a large percentage comes from cars and trucks.

T a k e *Action*

When it comes to having a positive effect on roadway issues in the Pioneer Valley, even your short-term actions will provide long-term benefits for you, your community, and the whole region. Try some of these suggestions and start enjoying those benefits.

To reduce traffic congestion and to enjoy safe and convenient options to driving alone . . .

Do This . . .

Carpool, take the bus, combine your car trips, walk, or bike.

Speak out for the adoption of zoning regulations in your community to control commercial strip development along our highways.

Let the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) know about areas in your community that are not sufficiently served by bus routes.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Fewer vehicles on the road translates to faster travel time for you . . . and less time being stuck in traffic. You will also cut down on gasoline and maintenance costs.

Over time, roadway congestion can be managed.

If the agency hears from a significant number of people, service can potentially be changed to meet your travel needs.

To improve the region's air quality . . .

Do This . . .

Live where you work and work where you live.

Carpool, take the bus, consolidate your car trips, walk, or bike.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

Less congestion on the roads improves air quality for the entire region.

Fewer vehicles on the road equals reduced air pollution, which means cleaner air for you to breathe.

To have a say in your community's future . . .

Do This . . .

Go to public hearings and voice your opinions about proposed road improvement projects, housing developments, and big commercial projects to be built in your city or town.

To Help Accomplish This . . .

You can help shape how your community grows over the short- and long-term.

The Pioneer Valley Region: Focusing on *The Big Picture*

A Time to Plan

When you look at our region as a whole, you see much more than the problems and successes of its parts—you see the strengths that transcend the level of individual communities and hold everything together. You see a place undergoing unprecedented changes as we move into a new century and a new millennium that represent not mere symbolic thresholds but unknown challenges in a vastly altered world.

At this critical juncture, it is time to shape and plan what the Pioneer Valley region will be in the future. Where will we all live? How will we get around? What jobs will be available? Where and how will we spend money for repairs, services, and growth? Such questions are easy enough to ask, but they are not so easy to answer.

All For One, One For All

Regional planning ultimately works to balance the needs of the communities that compose the region with what's best for the region overall. No matter what the planning activity, its goal is to make efficient use of what we already have.

Regional **transportation** planning sets priorities for projects using state and federal dollars to improve the entire transportation system. For the Pioneer Valley, this means weighing the importance of various road and bridge construction and maintenance projects, transit improvements, and bicycle and pedestrian projects in terms of safety, congestion relief, mobility, and environmental protection.

Regional **environmental** and **land use** planning seek to provide workable standards for development and redevelopment in towns and cities while protecting open space and relying on as much existing infrastructure—roads, water lines, and sewer systems—as possible.

Regional planning for **economic development** uses existing human and physical resources and infrastructure as the basis for attracting new businesses and jobs to the Valley.

Land use, environmental, economic, and transportation planning are not just tightly linked. They work together almost seamlessly to make the region hum. If we do not carefully, thoughtfully plan for our future—as a region, as communities, as business entities, and as individuals—our future will be out of our hands.



What You Can Do

The region depends on all of us to prudently and creatively use what we have to create the places we want. It is up to every community to make that happen. We encourage you to become involved in the local and regional issues that vitally affect you, our children, and future generations.

Your city or town hall is a good place to start. Ask for copies of your community's master plan, open space program, and zoning regulations. Find out when the planning board meets and obtain an agenda in advance. Follow the work of your community's conservation commission and contact it about important environmental issues.

In addition, there is a wide array of local and regional economic development agencies and organizations—the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, chambers of commerce, and the Plan for Progress trustees, among others—that help plan and implement programs and projects tied to the region's economic agenda. These sources can provide information, assistance, and advice for meeting the Pioneer Valley's short- and long-term economic goals.

What will the places in the Pioneer Valley region look like twenty-five years from now? It's a question all of us must answer, and it's a choice all of us must make—together.

There's *no place* like our
home.

Windows of Opportunity to a Century of Regional Collaboration

Prepared by the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission

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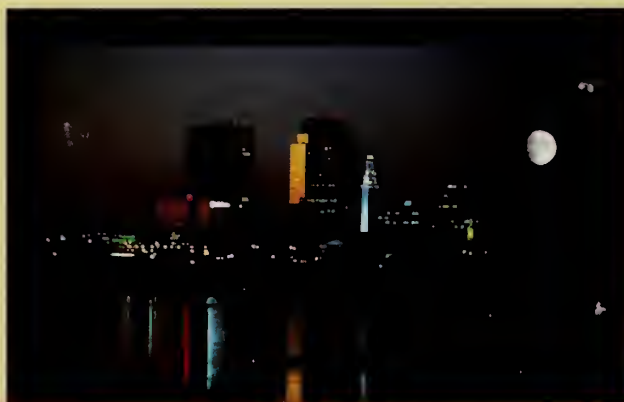
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